

HEALTH

What You Can Do to Heal Your Ulcer

Ulcers are sores on the lining of your digestive tract. Most ulcers are located in the duodenum. The duodenum is the first part of the intestine. These ulcers are called duodenal ulcers. Ulcers located in the stomach are called gastric ulcers. Ulcers in the esophagus are called esophageal ulcers.

A type of bacteria called *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*) causes many ulcers. Acid and other juices made by the stomach can contribute to ulcers by burning the lining of your digestive tract. This can happen if your body makes too much acid or if the lining of your digestive tract is damaged in some way. Physical or emotional stress may help cause ulcers.

Ulcers can also be caused by anti-inflammatory medicines. Although most people take these medicines without problems, long-term use may damage the stomach lining and cause ulcers. Anti-inflammatory drugs include aspirin, ibuprofen (brand name: Motrin), naproxen (brand name: Aleve), ketoprofen (brand names: Actron, Orudis KT) and some prescription drugs for arthritis.

How can ulcers be treated?

One way to treat ulcers is to get rid of the *H. pylori* bacteria. Treatment may also be aimed at lowering the amount of acid that your stomach makes, neutralizing the acid and protecting the injured area so it can heal. It's also very important to stop doing things, such as smoking, that damage the lining of your digestive tract. Also, triple therapy is a treatment to eliminate *H. pylori*. It is a combination of two antibiotics and bismuth (brand name: Pepto-Bismol). Other combinations may also be effective. This treatment may be used with medicine that reduces the amount of acid your stomach makes.

Several other medicines can be used to help treat ulcers. Two types of medicines (H_2 blockers and proton pump inhibitors) reduce the amount of acid that your stomach makes. They usually help people start to feel better within 3 days. Antacids neutralize acid that the stomach makes. A medicine called sucralfate (brand name: Carafate) coats the ulcer to protect it from the acid so it has time to heal. Another medicine, misoprostol (brand name: Cytotec), reduces the amount of acid and protects the lining of the stomach. It is usually used to prevent gastric ulcers in people who need to take anti-inflammatory drugs and who have had stomach irritation or ulcers in the past.

It is important to have regular check-ups and follow all medical care instructions that your family physician prescribes when caring for an ulcer.



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